

# HELP TO GROW.

MANAGEMENT COURSE



## GROW YOUR OWN WAY

### STORIES FROM A YEAR OF THE HELP TO GROW: MANAGEMENT COURSE

A report from the Small Business Charter, supported by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

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The Help to Grow: Management Course offers an outstanding opportunity for small business owners to enhance their management and strategic capabilities, build resilience, develop their value proposition and reach into growth markets whilst being supported by academics, and experienced business owners.

**PROFESSOR JOHN ANDERSON**  
**STRATHCLYDE BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Help to Grow: Management Course is designed to help senior managers of small and medium sized businesses boost their business's performance, resilience, and long-term growth.

Announced by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak in Spring 2021, the course is being delivered across the UK by world-class business schools accredited by the Small Business Charter.

This report tells the story of the first year of the programme, and the impact it is already having on the UK's small business community.

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The Help to Grow: Management Course is an integral part of this government's offering to businesses, enabling and empowering the private sector to increase investment and growth so that those good jobs are available at a local level.

Paul Scully, Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

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# FOREWORD

Paul Scully MP, Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

SMEs are at the heart of our economy, making up 99.9% of the UK's business population, and accounting for half of private sector employment and turnover. During the pandemic we saw an extraordinary level of innovation and resilience from these firms who continued to keep the economy moving and delivered for their customers in the most challenging circumstances.

Businesses will continue to play a key role in our ongoing mission to level up and drive growth across the whole country. I know there are significant challenges ahead that businesses will have to navigate. I want to ensure they have the tools to come through these challenges and continue creating high productivity and high wage jobs across all regions of the UK.

The Help to Grow: Management Course is an integral part of this government's offering to businesses, enabling and empowering the private sector to increase investment and growth so that those good jobs are available at a local level. Last month I spoke at a panel with Help to Grow: Management Alumni and heard first-hand the direct impact the course is already having on individual companies.

Providing them with training on the latest management techniques from leading business schools, one-to-one mentoring that help businesses implement a bespoke plan to maximise their growth, and access to the national Alumni Network for ongoing support.

The course is currently being delivered by 48 business schools across all parts of the UK, including in all the Home Nations, with more schools in the pipeline. A strong recovery requires all business opportunities be taken no matter where they exist. I am committed to ensuring that business leaders from across the UK have the support and skills to seize those opportunities.

I strongly encourage SME leaders thinking about signing up to the programme to do so. As set out in the case studies later in this report, it will provide you with access to the very best advice on how to innovate, reach new customers, boost profits and maximise you and your business' potential.



Department for  
Business, Energy  
& Industrial Strategy

# CHAIR'S STATEMENT

Michael Hayman MBE DL, Chair,  
Small Business Charter



The Help to Grow: Management Course supports UK small firms to unlock potential by accessing the expertise of world class business schools the length and breadth of the country.

In just under a year since the first cohort of companies were convened it has established itself as a superb asset offering great advantages to attendees: access to some of the best minds in business and one-to-one mentoring.

Backed by the government, it helps small business leaders develop the strategic skills to increase their long-term productivity, growth, and innovation.

In turn, Help to Grow practically addresses a long-standing need for investment in leadership training for small firms, and as such has the potential to be a critical step in powering a new chapter for our entrepreneurial ecosystem.

There are high levels of satisfaction expressed from the companies attending, which suggests great potential for the programme to support more small firms in the coming years.

Not least because they could benefit greatly from not only the content but also its tremendous value: each place is subsidised by some 90% and delivers a fantastic return for business leaders.

Over recent years the UK's track record of fostering start-ups and scale-ups has put small-and-medium sized firms at the heart of our national economic growth.

The UK has incredible credentials as a start-up nation, one of the best on the planet. 2020/21 saw some 810,316 company incorporations. An increase of 21.8% when compared with 2019 to 2020 and the highest number of incorporations on record.

This track record of attainment and energy provides us with a superb stock of companies with further potential to realise. And it is indeed the journey from start-up to scale-up that offers tantalising opportunities for not only individual company growth but also national economic growth and enhanced productivity.

But backing small firms is much more than just an economic case, there is a purpose-led case here also. These businesses are often the bedrock of local communities. Certainly as employers but also so much more than that.

The businesses I have met who have attended the Help to Grow: Management courses seem so often to be driven by the ambition to make a difference. Through products and services, giving back within their own communities, or helping to address some of the driving challenges of our time: sustainability, digitisation, social mobility and more.

These are just some of the reasons that I am so very excited about the potential for this course not only because it provides companies with expertise, but because it will also help build those companies to be catalysts for positive change.

There are stiff head winds facing the UK economy, which means the course has an immense and immediate practical value for those firms taking part. If you accept the premise that knowledge is power you can see why there must be a better way than learning from your mistakes.



In turn, the recent past shows just how important smaller scaling companies are to national prosperity. They make up around 60% of employment and half of the UK's entire private sector turnover.

But here's a thought. We haven't seen anything yet. Think about the rapid rise of companies around the world that have been spurred forward by the transforming opportunities of digital. It has turned young companies into established names in moments. And they have paved the way for others. It means that in all likelihood the most powerful companies of our lifetime are yet to be created.

How we as a nation are match fit for that future requires an unapparelled effort in making sure that we are always improving. Getting better faster. I feel that acutely as a company founder, and it's why I see the value of this new course in preparing more people to tool up their businesses for the future.

The Small Business Charter is the mark of excellence for small business leadership education in UK business schools. The brilliant business schools it accredits deliver the Help to Grow: Management Course, and the pages that follow bring to life a tapestry of stories from around the country of the businesses that are benefiting.

It's an inspiring read about the first year of a four year mission. It's one that seeks to unlock the growth potential of UK enterprise by helping our small firms to grow their own way and make the difference.

“The journey from start-up to scale-up offers tantalising opportunities for not only individual company growth but also national economic growth and enhanced productivity.”



# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REFLECTIONS

Anne Kiem OBE, Chief Executive, Chartered Association of Business Schools and Executive Director, Small Business Charter

I am immensely proud of what the Small Business Charter team has delivered over the last 12 months.

Through our experienced business school facilitators and academics, mentors, small business leaders and members of the Small Business Charter team, we have created a small business-focused curriculum designed specifically to help business leaders and senior managers boost their business's productivity, growth and profits. In the first 12 months, thousands of small business leaders have already completed the programme.

Consisting of 12 modules delivered over 50 hours, the Help to Grow: Management course covers four key areas: strategies for growth and innovation, engaging with customers, building a sustainable and agile business, and operations and financial strategies. It is taught through a blend of face-to-face and online delivery models and includes case study content created specifically for the course. For example, there is unique case study material recorded by Ben Francis, founder of GymShark, a UK business that grew from start up in 2012 to a valuation of more than £1 billion in 2020.

Courses are taught in cohorts of up to 25 people. This allows participants to build relationships with their peers on the course. They benefit from both the support of small business leaders facing similar challenges to their own and the different perspectives of peers operating in very different sectors. We are already seeing evidence of business leaders having the confidence to employ more people, enter new markets and launch new products directly as a result of attending the course. We are also seeing course participants successfully introduce new ways of

working and engaging with employees to ensure teams are engaged in the business journey.

We have a network of 48 business schools to deliver the Help to Grow: Management curriculum right across the UK, and this number continues to grow. Each of these schools has worked through the rigorous assessment requirements of the Small Business Charter accreditation, ensuring they are committed to the development and success of all small business leaders participating in this and other such courses.

The feedback from course participants has been fantastic. They remark on the breadth of the content covered, the value of peer support, particularly valuable for leaders running a business for the first time, and the invaluable support received during 10 hours of 1-2-1 mentoring. For many leaders running a business and often without any formal business training, the course has provided the structure and tools to scale their business with confidence, and the leadership skills to ensure all their employees are engaged in the journey too.

We were delighted to welcome Michael Hayman, MBE, as chair of the Small Business Charter in January 2022. Michael's experience and energy will help us reach a bigger audience of potential participants, build on our engagement with partners like NatWest, who can help us raise awareness of the course in the small business communities across the UK, communicate the successes of the course and the fabulous and diverse businesses who participate.

### **Alumni Network: a foundation for growth**

The Help to Grow: Management Course is just the beginning. We are working hard with the business schools and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to establish the Help to Grow: Management Alumni Network. This network will provide a community of like-minded small business leaders focused on delivering growth and innovation. These businesses will be beacons for other leaders of SMEs to grow their businesses, delivering a Help to Grow: Management legacy of growth, productivity and jobs across the UK.

Shaped by feedback from alumni across the UK, we are developing a programme of local, regional and national events and high-quality thought leadership that will not only celebrate the successes of our alumni but also provide members of the Alumni Network with exclusive access to case studies, content and useful tools. The Alumni Network will support business leaders to continue to grow their business with ongoing access to the expertise in our great business schools.

“The feedback from course participants has been fantastic. They remark on the breadth of the content covered, the value of peer support, particularly valuable for leaders running a business for the first time, and the invaluable support received.”



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Engaging with a network of fellow SME business leaders, with the theory and real-world knowledge of staff at Sheffield Hallam, allows us to translate concept into practice. This is already leading to improved productivity and opportunities for growth at YES Energy Solutions CIC.

**DUNCAN CROMBIE, CEO,  
YES ENERGY SOLUTIONS CIC**

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## WHAT IS THE HELP TO GROW: MANAGEMENT COURSE?

The Help to Grow: Management Course was launched with the objective of supporting senior managers and medium-sized businesses to boost their business's performance, resilience and long-term growth. The course will run over 4 years, with the goal of reaching 30,000 business leaders across the UK.

The course is delivered by business schools, accredited by the Small Business Charter which recognises business schools' expertise in supporting the small business community. The curriculum is taught by academics specialising in areas of business practice such as leadership, innovation and strategy. The course curriculum was co-designed by an expert advisory panel with representatives from business schools and small businesses. It consists of the following 12 modules:

1. Strategy and innovation
2. Digital adoption
3. Internationalisation and winning new markets
4. Building a brand
5. Developing a marketing strategy
6. Vision, mission and values
7. Organisational design
8. Employee engagement and leading change
9. High performance workplace
10. Efficient operations
11. Finance and financial management
12. Implementing growth plans

The course is spread across 12 weeks and is a blend of online and face-to-face, helping small business leaders complete the course alongside other commitments.

Course participants are matched with a mentor who has small business experience. They receive 10 hours of 1-2-1 mentoring support helping to make sure learnings and plans developed during the course are implemented.

**50 HOURS**  
OF CURRICULUM CONTENT  
DESIGNED FOR SMALL  
BUSINESS LEADERS

**12 MODULES**  
COVERING KEY AREAS OF  
LEADERSHIP

**4 CASE STUDIES**  
DELIVERED FACE-TO-FACE

**12 WEEKS**  
TO FIT ALONGSIDE EXISTING  
WORK AND PERSONAL  
COMMITMENTS

**10 HOURS**  
OF 1-2-1 MENTORING

**48 BUSINESS  
SCHOOLS**  
ACROSS THE UK

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There is no doubt in my mind that the Help to Grow: Management Course has been instrumental in giving me the confidence to grow my business.

**LOUISE TOWLER**  
**FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, INDIGO TREE**

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# CASE STUDY

## LOUISE TOWLER

### FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, INDIGO TREE

The first time Louise Towler tried coding was Christmas Day 2000. "My husband bought me a book about HTML for Christmas, and he ended up having to cook Christmas dinner himself while I sat at the family computer!"

This chance encounter with coding started Louise on a path which led to her founding Hertfordshire-based, web agency Indigo Tree in 2011. The business focuses on delivering well-designed, functional Wordpress-based websites. Clients are predominantly smaller, micro businesses that Louise has won through regular networking and word of mouth.

The agency now employs 15 people and has delivered literally hundreds of WordPress sites for customers as diverse as construction companies, lawyers, not-for-profit organisations, and schools.

Louise first came across the Help to Grow: Management Course in a news article. "I saw the piece in the Financial Times and kept thinking about it. I realised that I didn't know what I didn't know and decided I should sign up," explains Louise.

As a direct result of the Help to Grow: Management Course at Brunel Business School, Louise applied for the Women in Innovation Awards and was one of the winners announced on International Women's Day, March 8th, 2022. Help to Grow: Management gave her the confidence and tools that she needed to do this.

Winning the award resulted in her business receiving a cash injection of £50,000. She has invested this financial award back into the business to support the development of a new platform to empower WordPress content editors with real-time feedback on accessibility and performance issues before they occur. Louise then applied for a 5-week Service Design Course with the Royal College of Art that will allow her to build on existing skills and refine the service wrap around their new product. Buoyed by this success, she applied for a place on a Sustainability Accelerator course and got this too.

"As a business, we are now way more ambitious than we were. For example, I have had the confidence to put our prices up to reflect the service we offer our clients. While I have a maths degree and enjoy the budgeting process, I am now more confident about the numbers that I need to look at before expanding the team. Previously I would have waited until we won the work, and everybody was stretched. My original plan for this year was to grow to 15 people. It's only halfway through the year and we're at 15 already."

The course has also provided practical tools to help Louise manage and scale the business.



"The course has given me 12 levers I can use when I'm thinking about the business. When we're going through change, I can think about where people are on the change curve. It's really helpful to have these tools at my disposal."

"There is no doubt in my mind that the Help to Grow: Management Course has been instrumental in giving me the confidence to grow my business."



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No matter where you are in your leadership journey, you will get a lot out of the Help to Grow: Management Course. I don't know anybody that would have done the course and not come away with something valuable.

**BEVERLEY LEWIS**  
CEO, WELSH TRIATHLON LIMITED

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# CASE STUDY

## BEVERLEY LEWIS

### CEO, WELSH TRIATHLON LIMITED

As CEO of Welsh Triathlon Limited, Beverley Lewis has plenty of opportunity to speak with leaders and senior managers within the world of sport, what she lacked was the opportunity to learn from small business leaders outside of sport.

"I was looking to fill the gaps in my knowledge, particularly gaps in the business world. The Help to Grow: Management Course definitely provided the perspective I was looking for. It gave me a lot of confidence that what we were doing was the right thing but also showed me we could do more, push more boundaries. My experience was very different from that of other people on the course. We were incorporated as Welsh Triathlon Limited in 2010, but we exist to raise money to put back into the sport of triathlon. Despite this difference in purpose, all the learning was relevant and very interesting."

Beverley joined Cardiff Business School's first Help to Grow: Management cohort in September 2021. The Employee Engagement and Leading Change module was particularly useful for Beverley.

"I conducted an intensive staff survey; it was much broader than anything I would have done without the course. I asked questions about our values, as well as what motivates, and is important, to the team. The insight and honesty I received from doing this survey was phenomenal. I have already made 10-12 significant changes as a result of the feedback I received."

The first change that Beverley made was to the working environment.

"Through the survey, I realised that the office was not somewhere people wanted to come back to after Covid. I approached Sport Wales and asked for help in making the office a better place to work. They replaced the carpet, installed better lighting, painted the walls and we went paperless. This really lifted everybody's spirits. The team enjoys coming into work and collaborating together and then works from home when they need to have more thinking time. It is working really well."

Beverley has also implemented changes to the Personal Development Review, moving from a once-a-year review to a more continuous review process.

"I wouldn't have done any of this without the Help to Grow: Management Course. I was able to share the theory with the team, explain where the thinking had come from and then put it into action. I realised that if I did such a comprehensive survey then it was really important that changes were made. Taking action in this way validates me as a leader."

A few months after finishing the course, Beverley is still in contact with other business leaders from her cohort and subsequent Cardiff Business School cohorts. They are providing the insight and support from the wider business community



that she was missing prior to the Help to Grow: Management Course and helping her to move the organisation on.

"No matter where you are in your leadership journey, you will get a lot out of the Help to Grow: Management Course. I don't know anybody that would have done the course and not come away with something valuable."



**WELSH  
TRIATHLON  
CYMRU**

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I would definitely recommend the Help to Grow: Management Course. The opportunity to be in a room with people in the same position as me, trying to grow their businesses, wanting to take the next step but not being quite sure how to do it, was really valuable.

**CHRIS REEKS**  
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, FENTRADE ALUMINIUM

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# CASE STUDY

## CHRIS REEKS

### CO-FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, FENTRADE LIMITED

Having worked in the double-glazing industry for 30 years, Newport-based Chris Reeks had long held a burning ambition to set up his own business. In August 2018, he invested heavily and took the plunge.

"I wanted to build a company that delivered a consistent service with good quality, something that is reliable and dependable for my customers."

Chris has designed Fentrade so it has control over its supply chain, construction, delivery, and communications. This helps him to ensure that the service the team offers is right first time, every time.

Since its launch in August 2018, the business has reported positive profits each year. In just 4 years, the business has grown from 3 people – including Chris – to 16 people with further recruitment underway to deal with the growing demand.

The challenge was how to take the business to the next level.

"I'm the first to admit that you can't know everything and do everything, but I knew that I wanted to grow the business, and that we needed to put systems and processes in place to put the business on a more formal track."

At first, there didn't seem to be many routes to access this type of support. "I didn't want to pay large amounts of money to a consultant, but I knew I needed to talk to people who are running businesses and find the opportunity to bounce ideas off peers."

It was Chris's wife Jane that spotted the course online and pointed it out to him.

"She thought it would be advantageous for me, and for us as a business. I could see it offered a broad brush across a lot of topics at a vastly reduced cost because of the government funding. The course would give me the support that I was looking for, and the opportunity to talk to people who are running businesses and facing some of the same challenges as me."

The 12 course modules are designed to cover the key elements of strategy that a small business leader needs.

"I took little things away from every lesson. An interview policy is a good example of a simple procedure I have introduced as a direct result of the conversations with my Help to Grow: Management mentor."

"The course has helped me to focus on making sure we have the right procedures in place as we scale up."

Prior to the course, Chris was already planning a new product line. A lot of what was covered in the Help to Grow: Management course will inform the way that Fentrade does this.

"Coming on the course has helped me think of different ways I can approach marketing the new product. For example, I used



to take a scattergun approach to marketing and hope we got something back. I am already making our marketing more tailored, sending out fewer but more focused communications. This has saved me time because we are channelling our efforts in a more targeted way. When we come down to the new product line launch, this will be paramount."

"I would definitely recommend the Help to Grow: Management Course to give people a better understanding and an overall knowledge of how businesses and organisations ought to be run. The opportunity to be in a room with people in the same position as me, trying to grow their businesses, wanting to take the next step but not being quite sure how to do it, was invaluable."

**fentrade**   
Aluminium Building Products

## THE VIEW FROM THE BUSINESS SCHOOLS

### NEWCASTLE BUSINESS SCHOOL

Continuous Professional Development and short courses such as the Help to Grow: Management Course are vital in our region to build stronger capabilities amongst the small business community, and to provide support and inspiration to drive growth.

Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University has delivered four cohorts in year one of the Help to Grow: Management programme. Businesses from a variety of sectors have participated in the course, including construction, manufacturing, professional services, technology, education, and health. The leaders involved have commented on the high quality of the curriculum and the support, advice and guidance provided by the expert speakers, academic facilitators, and programme staff. Comments from participants particularly mention the value of the face-to-face case studies and how much they enjoyed meeting the other leaders in their cohort. Most people were very satisfied with the course and mention developing a better understanding about the fact that to drive their business forward, they need to be 'on' the business rather than 'in' it. For many, there is also a realisation that they need to surround themselves with experts in different fields. One participant mentioned a growing confidence to share with their staff the fact that they do not always have the answer themselves.

**Dr Matt Sutherland**, Associate Professor of Marketing, Northumbria University



**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE



### DERBY BUSINESS SCHOOL

As we emerge from the pandemic, as well as observe the country post Brexit, the Help to Grow: Management Course is equipping small business leaders with the skills to manage change during the uncertainty that lies ahead.

As a facilitator on the programme, it has been a delight to watch course participants grow, develop and advance their skill set. The greatest benefit that we have seen is that it provides individuals time away from the business, allowing them to work on:

1. The business
2. A business growth plan
3. The business direction and vision

The programme has a real benefit to the business, and the individual. As an individual, we have seen networks built, and participants ready to learn more. The programme has also allowed them to see the University in a different light. Although we're an academic institution, we're able to apply our learning and research to advance them as well advancing their organisation.

The blend of in-person and virtual learning, means that the programme fits around them and their existing commitments. Each week we watch as they grow, learn new skills and share the challenges that they face. They work with us and their peers on finding the right solution.

**Dr Koushik Das Sarma**, Programme Lead – Help to Grow: Management, Derby Business School





## ASTON BUSINESS SCHOOL

Supporting inclusive growth in our region is key to Aston University's civic mission and developing leadership and management skills in small business leaders is one of the ways we are making a significant difference to SMEs. The Help to Grow: Management Course has provided us with a high-quality practical programme with which to engage a diverse range of SME leaders, and a perfect addition to the range of business support provided by the Aston Centre for Growth.

We notice immediate effects, not only in the adoption of new management practices within the business but also in the confidence and ambition of the business leaders. This mindset is developed in part through the increased business knowledge and skills of the participant but also importantly through learning from their peers in a supportive environment. It is the variety of businesses in the room and the willingness of participants to share their experiences that makes this programme so stimulating for speakers and participants alike.

As the cohort bonds and participants get to know the speakers and facilitators, we really do feel we are on a journey together, seeing ideas develop as the Growth Action Plans take shape and jointly celebrating wins along the way as participants solve a problem or have a lightbulb moment.

**Paula Whitehouse FRSA**, Associate Dean for Enterprise, Aston University



“We notice immediate effects, not only in the adoption of new management practices within the business but also in the confidence and ambition of the business leaders. This mindset is developed in part through the increased business knowledge and skills of the participant but also importantly through learning from their peers in a supportive environment.”

**Paula Whitehouse FRSA**, Associate Dean for Enterprise, Aston University

## WHERE IS HELP TO GROW: MANAGEMENT MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

The Help to Grow: Management Course is currently offered by 48 business schools across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The map below shows the locations of the business schools but many schools deliver the course in other locations, ensuring that businesses in every region have access to the course. The first cohorts in Northern Ireland will start in September 2022.



Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University  
Aston University, Aston Business School  
Faculty of Business and Law, Anglia Ruskin University  
University of Bedfordshire Business School  
Birkbeck School of Business, Economics and Informatics  
Birmingham City Business School, Birmingham City University  
Bournemouth University Business School  
University of Bradford School of Management  
School of Business and Law, University of Brighton  
Brunel Business School  
Cardiff University, Cardiff Business School  
Cardiff School of Management, Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Coventry University, Coventry Business School  
Leicester Castle Business School  
Derby Business School, University of Derby  
Edinburgh Business School, Heriot Watt University  
Gloucestershire Business School  
Hertfordshire Business School  
Huddersfield Business School  
Hull University Business School  
Kent Business School  
Kingston University, Kingston Business School  
Lancaster University Management School  
Leeds Business School, Leeds Beckett University

University of Leeds, Leeds University Business School  
University of Leicester School of Business  
Lincoln International Business School  
University of Liverpool Management School  
Guildhall School of Business and Law, London Metropolitan University  
School of Business, London South Bank University  
Manchester Metropolitan University Business School  
Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University  
University of Nottingham, Nottingham University  
Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham Business School  
Oxford Brookes Business School  
University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth Business School  
Queen's Management School  
University of Salford, Salford Business School  
Sheffield Business School  
Solent University, Solent Business School  
Staffordshire Business School  
Stirling Management School, University of Stirling  
Strathclyde Business School  
Teesside University International Business School  
Ulster University Business School  
University of the West of England, Bristol Business School  
University of the West of Scotland, School of Business & Creative Industries  
Winchester Business School

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If you have an open attitude, this will be the best £750 you ever spend!

**GRAEME CLARK**  
**MANAGING DIRECTOR, SCOT SERVE LIMITED**

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# CASE STUDY

## GRAEME CLARK

### MANAGING DIRECTOR, SCOT SERVE LIMITED

Graeme Clark and his wife Helen have run Clackmannanshire-based Scot Serve Limited since 2006. Graeme was the company's first employee, joining in 1996, ten years in, they liked it so much they bought it.

The business helps food and drink brands boost sales and distribution in key market channels. Their clients include brands like Kettle Chips, Yazoo and Casillero Del Diablo wine. In a recent award-winning project, they increased sales of Yazoo 1-litre in key wholesalers in Scotland by 42%.

Graeme is highly respected and well connected in the trade. Under his leadership, Scot Serve has gone from strength to strength and is now recognised as a leading provider of food and drinks sales solutions in Scotland and within the wider GB market.

Graeme signed up for the Help to Grow: Management Course at the University of Stirling Management School. He took part in a mixture of in-person and online lectures, seminars, and workshops with 16 others from a wide range of Scottish businesses between September 2021 and January 2022.

"I heard about the course through someone I know and I thought, 'At 52, what do I have to learn?' At the same time, I was feeling like I was losing track of the business a bit. We were growing, but everything was coming through me, and it was hard to see how we could expand. So, I thought, why not, if I learn one thing that'll be grand. Now I would say to people, if you have an open attitude, this will be the best £750 you ever spend!"

Having completed the Help to Grow: Management Course, Graeme says he is now expecting a growth in turnover of £1.5 million in three years, expecting to take the business from £2.5m to £4m by 2025.

"I didn't think we'd get to £3m in three years, to be honest. I felt like we were ahead of the curve, but had limited scope on where else to go. Now, I'm spending the next three to four months restructuring according to what I've learned, which has been a revelation."

Graeme is overhauling his business in four ways.

"The first thing is digitisation. Part of the course was a scorecard for how business-ready we were, and actually we were quite far along. It was a rubber stamp for our iPortal platform, but also allowed me to see how we might develop it, to bring in more automation for example.

"The second revelation was employee engagement. I had always been the one to have the ideas, and then we'd implement them. Our problems were mine, too. But I realised from the course that I wasn't sharing anything with my team – not accounts, or turnover – so it was difficult for them to add value. Now, I've brought them in – we're on our third strategy day, and they are bringing new insights and ideas.

"We've now come up with our mission, vision and values, which



has been really useful for defining what we're about. Now if I'm recruiting, I'll be looking at values too, because a business is all about the people.

"That has led to us changing our marketing strategy, so that we're talking about the benefits we deliver, rather than what we do. And because we have the data to show it, we're building that in so we can demonstrate those benefits to the brands we want to work with."

In March 2022, the business launched a new website complete with rebranding and updated messaging.

"I'm spending the next three to four months pulling together the strategy and then, after 16 years, I'll be pressing the button on 'year one' of taking the business to another level!"

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I have really enjoyed being able to spend time on critical thinking. Taking half a day a week to step back from the day-to-day priorities, look at the business overall and reflect where you can make changes has been invaluable. I don't think we've had the chance to do this in our business for a number of years.

**STEPHANIE WOOD**  
EXPORT ACCOUNT MANAGER, PLAYDALE PLAYGROUNDS

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# CASE STUDY

## STEPHANIE WOOD

### EXPORT ACCOUNT MANAGER, PLAYDALE PLAYGROUNDS

Stephanie is the Export Account Manager for Cumbria-based Playdale Playgrounds. A family-run business since 1978, it works with local authorities, schools, new housing developments and leisure facilities to design, manufacture and install outdoor children's playgrounds.

Joining as a sales administrator 10 years ago, Stephanie now manages distributors in 48 countries around the world. She doesn't have any formal business qualifications but is keen to develop her business knowledge and skills.

"I have a young family so at this point in my life I don't want to commit to studying for 2 or 3 years for a business qualification. The Help to Grow: Management Course is only 3 months. Finding half a day a week for 12 weeks felt like a manageable time commitment for me while still providing the opportunity for me to develop."

Stephanie signed up for the course with Manchester Metropolitan University. She has been very impressed with the way that the course is structured, providing a good mixture of online content accessed via the virtual learning environment, webinars and face-to-face sessions. Like many of the course participants across the UK, she has found the peer group and the mentoring invaluable, helping her to spot gaps in what the business is doing today and opportunities for growth in the future.

As a sales professional, Stephanie has been challenged to step outside of her day-to-day role and think differently. She explains: "I'm used to pitching the business to potential distributors and customers so always being in sales mode. Being forced to think critically about the business in terms of where the gaps are and how we can do things differently has forced me to flip that. It felt quite unnatural to me at first, but I am really enjoying it."

The mindset change happened quickly, and it wasn't long before Stephanie was putting concepts learnt on the course into practice.

"By week 4, I was already presenting ideas back to the board of directors. Having looked at vision, mission and values during the course, it became clear to me that everybody knows exactly what they need to do to deliver good product design and customer satisfaction every day, but we don't have a clearly communicated company vision in place. I took some of the examples we studied and combined these with my own thoughts to give a presentation to the Playdale directors. Everybody was on board straight away. They could see the gap and that is now being worked on. It was an instant win."

Like many of her peers across the course, she has also been able to directly apply the learning to live projects.



"I'm leading on the diversity and inclusion strategy in the workplace. The course has complemented my own research into the subject, helping me to form a strategy and put the plan into practice."

At a personal level, the Help to Grow: Management Course has helped Stephanie develop her own confidence and profile within the organisation.

"At the end of the Help to Grow: Management Course, I will present a business plan back to the board of directors, highlighting the opportunities that I think we should focus on and using what I have learnt to feed into the future strategy. Having had a positive response to my presentation in week 4, I am confident that the board will be open to listening to me when I go back at the end of the course and present my ideas and recommendations."

**Playdale**  
Quality products since 1735

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On the Help to Grow: Management Course, learning with delegates from a wide range of business sectors can help people reflect on what might be taken for granted in a business or sector and then apply those lessons in ways that are relevant, and potentially innovative, for their own ventures.

ROBERT WAPSHOTT, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION,  
NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL.

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# BACKGROUND ON THE SMALL BUSINESS CHARTER

The Small Business Charter (SBC) is an award for the UK's world-class business schools. The SBC award celebrates business schools that play an effective role in supporting small businesses, local economies, and student entrepreneurship.

SMEs, start-ups and students can receive expert advice, training and courses from business schools based right across the UK. The SBC award will help them find the business school that can help them.

With 5.6 million SMEs trading across the UK, the network of business schools awarded with a Small Business Charter are ideally placed to provide growth, enterprise and entrepreneurship support to help SMEs maximise their productivity and their contribution to the UK Economy.

In order to achieve the Small Business Charter award, business schools undergo a rigorous assessment to determine the effectiveness of their business support, entrepreneurship education and engagement with their local economy. 59 business schools across the UK now hold the Small Business Charter and have directly supported more than 18,750 small businesses.

The Small Business Charter was developed by Lord Young, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (now BEIS), and the Chartered Association of Business Schools. In addition to providing business schools with a nationally recognisable accreditation award, we also facilitate valuable knowledge sharing networks for business schools and promote the value of the business knowledge, management expertise, and enterprise education offered by our business schools to SME audiences.

For more information visit: **[smallbusinesscharter.org](https://smallbusinesscharter.org)**

To find out about the Help to Grow: Management Course, visit: **[smallbusinesscharter.org/help-to-grow-management](https://smallbusinesscharter.org/help-to-grow-management)**



# HELP TO GROW.

MANAGEMENT COURSE

